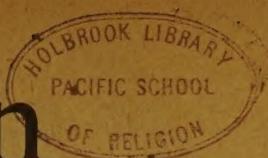


The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM



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DEAR MEMBER,

I drew attention recently to the appalling suffering in some of the occupied countries in Europe resulting from famine and malnutrition. It is welcome news that some relief is being brought to the starving people of Greece. One ship has arrived with 7,000 tons of wheat, a second (a Swedish vessel) is loading at Lisbon, and a third is to sail from New York with flour and medical supplies. The Greek Red Cross is purchasing medical supplies in Egypt, and food from Turkey is also reaching Athens. Since in peace time Greece had to import annually 400,000 tons of wheat, the relief afforded by these supplies does not go far and cannot avail to reduce by more than a small fraction the number of daily deaths.

HUNGER IN EUROPE

The state of things in Greece where, especially in the towns, starvation has reached an acute stage, is happily not found in all the occupied territories. Famine conditions no doubt prevail in large parts of Poland and occupied Russia. There is serious malnutrition in Belgium, as has already been pointed out in the News-Letter. Generally speaking, however, the rural populations in occupied territories are not for the most part suffering serious deprivation, and in countries like Denmark and Holland nutrition, while considerably below the standards of peace time, appears still to be sufficient, even in the towns, to maintain reasonable health.

The fact that starvation in Greece and elsewhere and serious malnutrition in some of the occupied countries are due to the action of Germany does not relieve us of the responsibility of doing everything we can to mitigate the distress. Yet, when we ask what can be done in present circumstances to provide help, we encounter what seem to be insuperable obstacles. The production and distribution of supplies is all part of a systematic policy controlled by Germany and determined by military considerations. The rations allowed to the inhabitants of occupied countries are considerably less than those provided in Germany and supplied to the occupying German army, on the ground, as stated by Dr. Ley, that other peoples need less food than the *Herrenvolk*.

The shortage in occupied territories is increased by the fact that the production of food in these countries has fallen considerably. There is a shortage of agricultural labour, which is especially acute in France, owing to the fact that Germany is still holding large numbers of prisoners of war. There are also complications resulting from the play of natural forces. The uncertainties of the situation have reinforced the traditional peasant attitude and led farmers to take to hoarding and to refrain from sowing more than they think can be sold at a profit. A favourable factor in the situation is that more is known to-day about nutritional values than in the last war, so that even when the food rations contain no more calories, the authorities have been able to provide a supply of other nutrients, such as vitamins C and D, and calcium, which may be of great value to certain classes of the population, e.g. children and nursing mothers.

Since the whole supply of food is systematically controlled by the German authorities for their own purposes, the admission of supplies from the Allies to a country like Belgium might very well lead Germany to reduce by a corresponding amount the provision it is making for maintaining the population at a subsistence level.¹ Apart from Greece, where the position is exceptional, it is difficult to see a way of overcoming these difficulties without relieving Germany, and so prolonging her resistance and consequently the sufferings of the inhabitants of the occupied territories.

But even if no immediate solution is apparent, we must not allow what is happening to cease tormenting us, nor relax our search for opportunities of mitigating the distress even in minor ways. We dare not lose sight of the danger of irretrievable injury to the physical and moral health of the coming generations. Our determination to bring every possible relief to the people of allied nations must be no less strong than if the suffering populations were British. "We are sending food to Germany," said Lord Woolton; as much as 200 tons of food have been sent to British prisoners of war in Germany in a single week. The risks of misappropriation are fewer than in the administration of supplies to the inhabitants of occupied countries, but they are not wholly absent.

The provision of large-scale relief, commensurate in any degree with the needs, is for the present out of the question, since it would require a large number of administrators and observers backed by the support of a government whose protests Germany would be reluctant to disregard. These conditions cannot be fulfilled. There is not necessarily the same bar, however, to small scale schemes of relief in the form of medical supplies, vitamins and special food for children, to be administered by neutral observers through hospitals and clinics. Such efforts might at least save the lives of thousands of children. By such means as these 50,000 children were kept alive in Poland for eighteen months, and many thousands more in unoccupied France. If such schemes were practicable, there are many in this country who would be glad to dip into their pockets and tighten their belts in order that the supplies and the shipping to convey them might be found. We shall let our members know when schemes of this kind take shape and are in need of support.

Another matter to which the attention of those concerned about conditions in Europe should be directed is the preparation of the Allied Governments for the relief of starving populations on the conclusion of the war. Public opinion should satisfy itself that the preparation by our own Government is as effective as it can be made, so that not a day may be lost in bringing relief and ensuring its widest distribution the moment that this becomes feasible.²

GOD AND CAESAR

A public meeting at which the call to national service was sounded by a Minister of the Crown was recently held in Salisbury Cathedral. In a letter to *The Times* Sir Percy Hurd expressed the hope "that the precedent thus set will bring our cathedrals all through the land into full use in a great Christian cause." It is devoutly to be hoped that it will not. If the cathedrals are to be used for this purpose, it would follow naturally that the churches and chapels should also be so used.

To speak of the war as "a great Christian cause" is a misleading use of language. The News-Letter has from the beginning taken the view that the differences between what we stand for and what our enemies stand for are important enough to justify the price of defending what we believe to be a higher way of life. But that is very different from saying that the national cause is a Christian cause. Christianity belongs to a quite different dimension. It is something that judges us and our cause as well as our enemies.

¹ Since the summer of 1940 Germany has sent 400,000 tons of cereals to Belgium.

² Copies of the report of the Conference on Food Relief, to which reference was made in C. N.-L. No. 125, may be obtained from the National Peace Council, 39 Victoria Street, London, S.W. 1. (4d., post free).

And it is precisely in this recognition of something above us by which we ourselves are continually judged that there is any hope for the future. The distinction between the claims of God and of Caesar is the foundation of European civilization. The great contribution of Christianity to western civilization was that it broke up the unity of the self-contained community-state by declaring that man has a double allegiance, to God as well as to Caesar. The Nazis want to reverse this process. I quoted last week the statement that the Nazi aim was "to overcome the spiritual and psychological principles of the last two millennia." It is the deliberate purpose of the Nazi leaders to destroy what has given its character to European civilization and to return to a primitive tribalism.

The existence of our cathedrals and churches is a witness to the worship of a God enthroned above the nation. Their general use for national purposes would confuse the vital distinction between the spheres of the Church and the earthly state. No one would question that there is a relation between our worship and the life-and-death struggle in which we are at present engaged in defence of what we believe to be higher values. All that that struggle means must be lifted up in worship. For this reason no hard and fast rule can be laid down regarding the use of church buildings. What must never be lost sight of is that the worship of a holy God does not mean the endorsement of our own understanding of the national cause, but is a call to test it continually in the light of eternal standards in order that our purposes may be purified and raised to a higher level.

FROM OUR MAIL-BAG

Here are some samples of the comments that reach us on what appears in the News-Letter. The writers represent three different generations, in the sense that each is separated from the next by about twenty years.

(1) "The trouble, I think, is not with terminology, but with the lives and experience of professing Christians. You put the situation with painful clarity : 'the Gospel we know to be dynamite, but somehow we are not blown up.' This business isn't going to be cured by terminology, and to think so is really just another way of doing what I myself am doing all the time—evading the issue which is *in oneself* and blaming it on something *outside*. We Christians will help, not by making new pronouncements, new creeds, new religious language, but by coming to terms with ourselves—finding if the words we use from the Gospels and St. Paul hold any meaning for us—whether, in a word, we have any faith. Nothing else will dynamite us or the world. Sometimes I feel such a chasm between what I believe with my head and what I feel and experience imaginatively and creatively that I think it would be more honest to stop professing Christianity—but somehow one can't do that."

(2) "It is true that the young folk don't believe in what I call religion. One of our young fellows shocked me the other day by asking what Passion Week was. Well, had it not been that I was keen on singing, I might never have had the traditional background of orthodox religion, for you cannot sing psalms and doze through sermons for twenty-five years without a little bit sticking here and there. Nearly all our fellows are 'educated.' I left school at twelve. They criticize religion without having experienced even the least proportion of what it has meant to innumerable people. Even the Plymouth Brothers stood for something in my time. The emotional Methodism gave a meaning to life to thousands. I have seen it. And the cold parish church I went to encouraged a love of things which helped me to bury both parents and children with grief, but not despair. Religion may be the opium for my kind, but assuredly I would have perished without it. But I have been bitter. In the town I belonged to everyone was working class except departmental managers, shopkeepers, etc. ; but when we were all on the dole I never remember the comfortable churchwardens showing any imaginative understanding of our problems, nor the vicar either. We were left to stew in our own juice, and did.

"Now I am nearly forty years old and feel like Methuselah among the twenty's. Part of my job, as I see it, is to help them create a faith. They are a good crowd and worth redeeming—as, of course, all men are. I believe that until they learn the implications of caring for other folk they will never come to know God. You see, in England there is a terrific demand for the security and organized responsibility we know as Fascism, especially among lower middle-class

people. I have a devil of a job explaining that if you have a few pounds in the bank it is there to spend if the need arises. I am clean outside the class which reserves its capital as though dissipation of it was the sin against the Holy Ghost. But there is just a thin clue, an echo in the memory, of the spirit of Christ which prevents Fascism here, and we have to encourage that. It's like starting on a clean sheet conscious that we have muddied all the previous sheets. People of my generation have the memory of religion, but these youngsters haven't got it at all. Their minds are blank. It's going to be uphill work, but we will have to try it or perish."

(3) "I am a keen reader of the News-Letter. I am going overseas in the immediate future as a tank driver and have subscribed to the C.N.L. for a year ahead, more perhaps as an act of faith than from the reasoning that it will always reach me. I am twenty-three, have been in the war since it started and was in the Flanders retreat.

"I was particularly interested in what Middleton Murry said about the necessity of Christianity becoming experimental again. It recalled at once his own introduction to Dostoevsky, whose characters, both Christian and atheist, made of their intellectualism real experiments in life with a white-heat intensity of spiritual force. It seems clear that nineteenth-century liberalism and resultant confusion of liberal principles with religious values has become finally responsible for the stagnation of the sense of 'message' in Christianity, and for the absence of any kind of dramatic appeal—Christian liberalism being the most uninspiring of creeds, a religion of *laissez-faire* as to beliefs and legion as to doctrines. The sense of Nihilism seems to me the key sense of our age, where the catastrophic facts press hard upon the heels of prophecy. As such, this sense of Nihilism should be the ontological basis of a splendid Christian renewal instead of a bestial destruction. When Dostoevsky presents Christianity, as he does in the *Brothers Karamazov*, one really believes it :—

"The path Alyosha chose was a path going in the opposite direction, but he chose it with the same thirst for swift achievement. As soon as he reflected seriously he was convinced of the existence of God and immortality, and at once he instinctively said to himself, 'I want to live for immortality and will accept no compromise.' In the same way, if he had decided that God and immortality did not exist he would at once have become an atheist and a socialist. For socialism is not merely the labour question, it is before all things the atheistic question, the question of the form taken by atheism to-day, the question of the Tower of Babel built without God, not to mount to heaven from earth, but to set up heaven on earth. Alyosha would have found it strange and impossible to go on living as before'

"I see this only too apparently wherever education makes headway in the tanks. I meet educated and semi-educated people, usually the latter, as often as possible and the most salient reaction to conversation on the subject is a bewildered half-amusement and boredom that one can still waste time considering such things.

"Christian society should go in for an uncompromising militancy. For a time the diminution in its adherents would be a dramatic fact. To be a Christian would be a privilege instead of meaning everything and nothing. I am afraid this is rather muddled and a bit cryptic. I have no time to work it out. My draft departs in half an hour."

Yours sincerely,

J. H. Oldham

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